

REMARKS FOR BRAC SUBCABINET, Oct. 18, 2007

Isiah Leggett, Montgomery County Executive

- Lieutenant Governor Brown, members of the BRAC Subcabinet, distinguished guests and friends: Welcome and thank you for making time in your busy schedules today. I also want to extend my appreciation to Stew Edelstein and the University of Maryland at Shady Grove for their hospitality.
- This is an important opportunity to continue our dialogue about BRAC in our County. I want to stress that we are a partner with BRAC-impacted communities across the state. We well understand the significant burdens on these counties.
- Montgomery County is impacted by BRAC in several ways: Expansion at Fort Meade will bring thousands of new households to the region -- many to our county. Changes at the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency in Bethesda and at the Walter Reed Annex in Forest Glen will affect those communities.
- But today we want to talk about one of the most sensitive and highly publicized BRAC moves in the entire country: the merger of the Walter Reed Army Medical Center with the Bethesda Naval Hospital.
- Unlike any of the other BRAC moves throughout the country, this BRAC is the only one that expands a major military facility in an urban area. This will create significant unanticipated growth in an area that is already bursting at the seams.
- We don't have hard figures yet because there still is no Draft Environmental Impact Statement, but we know that hospital personnel will grow by at least 2,500. Some estimates are as high as 4,000 or more. That's a lot of people to shoehorn into a very congested urban neighborhood.
- Keep in mind the significant fact that what is coming to Bethesda is a major hospital complex serving America's most valued patients. The number of outpatient visits to the campus will double to about 900,000 visits per year.
- That's about 2,500 visits a day, every day of the year, most by car. Walter Reed is moving just five miles up the road as the crow flies. But while crows may fly, most people drive and a whole flock of people will be driving to Bethesda.
- We have engaged the community to be part of the solution because BRAC will have a major impact on their neighborhoods. We have formed a BRAC Implementation Task Force, with civic and business leaders working directly with county, state and federal officials to identify problems arising from BRAC and recommend solutions. Today you will hear about specific projects identified by this group to address traffic congestion that will be a major impact of BRAC.

- At this time, I would like acknowledge John Carman, the Chairman of the BRAC Task Force, for all the hard work he has put in this important project, on his own time. I would also like members of the BRAC Committee who are here today to please stand and be recognized. Thank you for your dedication to this task.
- I must stress another national implication of this BRAC – emergency preparedness. Sensitive biodefense research in infectious diseases is conducted at Bethesda Naval and NIH, right across the street. With Suburban Hospital, another adjacent neighbor that is the region's designated trauma center, these institutions comprise an emergency preparedness collaborative if a crisis hits the National Capital Region. For them, it is essential that traffic always flow.
- But here is the most important point I want to make: Please, please remember what this particular BRAC is about. It is about establishing the greatest, world-class center for military medicine and research.
- Montgomery County will have the honor of being host to the greatest Americans – those who have put everything on the line to serve their country. Soldiers are returning from fields of battle with wounds so severe and catastrophic that survival was inconceivable not so long ago. These wounds have long-term physical and psychological consequences, and these heroes deserve the best care. We must do right by them. We have a moral obligation to get this right.
- “We” means everybody in this room and our elected officials, from the Nation's Capital and the Pentagon, to Annapolis, to the County Seat. If we do not meet the challenges of BRAC, and if our national heroes -- the active wounded or retired military – cannot get timely treatment because they or their doctors are mired in gridlock, then we will have failed them.
- We have identified transportation projects to make this BRAC work. These include transit upgrades and incentives to get NNMC workers out of their cars, road and intersection improvements, safe pedestrian access, and a feasibility study for a Beltway off-ramp to the Navy Med campus.
- Today we will talk about how the State can help. But I need to stress that BRAC is a federal mandate that has significant impacts on our community. Therefore the United States Congress and the Department of Defense have an obligation to assume responsibility in this effort, especially since it involves Walter Reed.
- As a veteran myself, this is very personal for me. I know the fiscal realities in Annapolis, but I urge you to listen very carefully to the details of our presentation and find ways to help us serve our nation's greatest heroes.
- Thank you very much. I would now like to turn to Royce Hanson, Chairman of the Montgomery County Planning Board.